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ABSTRACT

The Staff Development for School Improvement Project (SDSI) combined the resources of Wayne State University with 19 schools from 15 school districts in the Detroit (Michigan) metropolitan area. The university provided a facilitator to guide each school through the following six-step change process: (1) awareness, readiness, and commitment; (2) needs assessment; (3) proposal writing by the building planning team; (4) implementation of the plan; (5) evaluation of progress; and (6) reassessment and continuation. Questionnaire responses from the school staffs showed that 82 percent or more agreed that the university had provided relevant activities, and noted improvements in a number of areas. Interviews with the planning teams indicated that the most positive aspects of SDSI were staff involvement in planning and decision-making and commitment to a long-term goal. The most difficult aspects of the program were time constraints and writing the first year plan. The majority of the successful schools: (1) had frequent contact with their university facilitator, (2) planned long-term programs with frequent SDSI activities, (3) arranged for released time for staff participation, (4) involved the majority of the staff members in SDSI activities, and (5) had the support of the school principal. Appended to the text are eight references and tables of school characteristics, schools' questionnaire responses, and characteristics of more- and less-successful schools. (MLF)

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EVALUATION OF A SIX- STEP STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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EVALUATION OF A SIX-STEP STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In recent years, great strides have been made in identifying characteristics of effective schools--those that are most effective in helping students learn. Such schools share the following common elements: (1) high staff expectations and morale, (2) a considerable degree of control by the staff over instructional and staff development decisions, (3) clear leadership from the principal, (4) clear goals for the school, and (5) a sense of order in the school (Purkey & Smith, 1982). Although there has been much work done on describing the common elements of effective schools, little research has been devoted to the question, How do we make schools more effective?

In the early 1980s we have seen several efforts to use staff development activities to improve schools (e.g., Stallings, Robbins, & Russell, in progress). Because such programs typically extend over two or three years, the evaluations of them are just beginning to be published (see Eubanks and Levine, 1983). And, at this time, there are very few such evaluations.

Sadly, there is little research available that sheds light on the process of school improvement. Little is known about the efficacy of building-level staff development models. In the most

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recent review of research for school improvement, MacKenzie (1983) writes that "the question of what is important in school effectiveness may now be less significant than the question of what can be changed for the least cost and the most results" (p.14). He concludes that the greatest need at this point is for studies that record the process of school improvement in detail.

The evaluation study reported here describes the input, processes, and outcomes of a building-level staff development model aimed at school improvement. Special emphasis was placed on documenting the processes of implementation in an effort to provide a deeper understanding of how school improvement occurs and the factors that facilitate or inhibit the success of such programs.

Method

In 1981, the College of Education at Wayne State University (WSU), received a grant from the state of Michigan to initiate a Staff Development for School Improvement Project (SDSI) in the Detroit metropolitan area. The purpose of SDSI was to combine the resources of the university with local school districts to provide building-level staff development training, with the ultimate aim of school improvement. The SDSI process was designed to be on-going, to take place at the building level, and

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to meet the needs generated by the teachers in a manner prescribed by the teachers.

Nineteen schools from 15 school districts began the program in late 1981 (see Table 1). Before a building could participate in SDSI, at least 70% of the building's staff had to be committed to use the SDSI six-step procedure for change. Each school received $4,000 during the first year, and $1,500 during the second year. The schools will receive $500 in the final year of the project, school year 1983-84. Along with the money, the university provided each building with a facilitator from its staff who was to guide the school through the six-step change process.

The first step in the model was awareness, readiness, and commitment. Step two was the needs assessment, and step three was the writing of the proposal by the building planning team (BPT). Step four of the process was the implementation of the plan--putting it into action. Step five involved evaluation of the progress made toward the goal. The final step was reassessment and continuat ion (Hough, et al., 1981).

The central questions of the evaluation were: 1) How did the participants feel about the six-step process? 2) What were the strengths and weaknesses of each step in the process? 3) What was the role of the university facilitator? 4) Did the six-step process enhance morale, communications, and the sense of responsibility for staff development? 5) Was the university seen

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as being helpful in local school improvement efforts? 6) Did the schools meet their objectives? and 7) What seemed to enhance or inhibit the success of the staffs in meeting the goals?

Data were collected during the spring of 1983 from three major sources: school staffs, building planning teams, and university facilitators. All participating staff completed questionnaires (ratings and open-ended questions) and the building planning teams were interviewed during a group meeting. Each facilitator completed a separate questionnaire.

Results

Staff Questionnaires

The staff questionnaire responses (See Table 2) indicated that the project was implemented as intended and highly successful in the majority of schools. Eighty-two percent or more of the respondents agreed that the university had provided relevant activities; that they had noted improvements in knowledge, skills, communication, and participation in staff development decisions; and that they felt positive about, committed to, and increased ownership of staff development in their buildings.

Among the most commonly mentioned strengths of the program were: (1) the opportunity to have input, responsibility, and free

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choice in the planning of the school activities, (2) improved staff morale and communication, (3) the quality of the staff development activities, and (4) the observed improvements in the school. The predominant suggestion for the future was to continue the process, but in greater depth.

The Building Planning Team Interviews

The planning teams indicated satisfaction with the awareness, readiness, and commitment activities and with the needs assessment process. Two-thirds of them, however, felt that the plan-writing phase had been quite difficult and that they had needed more assistance from the university. During implementation, the majority of the teams functioned as hoped: they provided release time for their staffs to participate in on-going staff development activities, and they actively involved their staffs in year-long planning and coordination of those activities. Many successful activities were conducted, including workshops, visitations, school projects, and conferences.

Approximately half of the sites conducted formal internal evaluation activities. At least 80% of the teams reported improvements in staff skills, knowledge, or attitudes and in school morale and communications. Desirable changes in students were noted by 70% of the teams. The most positive aspects of

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SDSI were the staff involvement in planning and decision making, in acquiring new skills and knowledge, and in making a commitment to a long-term goal.

The most difficult aspects of the program for the planning teams were: (1) time constraints and (2) writing the first year plan. The teams suggested that WSU provide more guidance and communication to building teams, a directory of staff development resources, and more opportunities to communicate with other SDSI participants.

The interview data suggest that the SDSI program was extremely successful with approximately 80% of the schools. It appears that the program could be strengthened by providing more university assistance and by reducing the time constraints, perhaps starting the program earlier in the fall.

Characteristics of More- and Less-Successful Schools

An important question to ask in the evaluation of any program is: Why were some schools more successful than other schools? If the factors related to success (or lack of success) can be identified, then more enlighted decisions can be made about the selection of and assistance provided for SDSI schools.

To examine these questions, the schools were ranked according

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to their scores on "General Success." These scores were formed by averaging the school scores on all 14 questions in sections A and B of the staff questionnaires (See Table 2). This "General Success" score thus reflected the teachers' general opinion of the program in their school. When a score was not available for a school, other data were examined to estimate general success.

The schools' scores on the 14 items could be interpreted differently; a low score may not necessarily indicate low success. It very plausibly could mean that some teachers had negative feelings toward the program and, hence, made low ratings on the questionnaire items. Negative attitudes toward the program may have resulted from the pressure to change and improve that is part of the SDSI process. Such pressures could have been irritating and stressful to some teachers, resulting in lower questionnaire scores.

Table 3 presents the 19 Cycle I schools categorized according to general success of the program (highest, middle, lowest). The schools with the highest success had average scores below 1.7, indicating the strongest agreement with the statements on the questionnaire. The "lowest-success" schools had scores above 2.3, indicating the weakest agreement with statements. It should be kept in mind that the latter group of schools were not necessarily unsuccessful, they were merely less successful than the other schools.

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On the left side of Table 3 are listed characteristics that were hypothesized to relate to success of the program. At the top (A, B, and C) are special characteristics of the schools that may have enhanced or impeded the success of the program. For example, the staff (or principals) in Schools 02, 03, and 10 had considerable prior experience with staff development--a distinct advantage in the implementation of the SDSI model. Schools 09 and 12, in contrast, were experiencing severe problems with principal-staff relations--a factor that could seriously hamper the success of the SDSI program. School 16 appeared to have problems with a faction of highly resistant teachers (which may have lowered their General Success Score; note their high standard deviation in Table 2). School 18 was a newly opened school that was experiencing principal-staff communication problems and could not get substitutes to come to their school--a definite disadvantage. Schools 11 and 17 were experiencing high staff turnover rates and School 15 entered the project one year after the other schools. School 08 could only get three substitutes at a time.

When comparing the highest-success and lowest-success schools, another potentially important factor arises--the grade levels served by the school. Three of the four less successful schools were secondary schools; all highly successful schools were elementary schools. The two middle schools fell in the middle of the continuum. School grade-level may have been a confounding

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factor in this analysis.

The bottom part of Table 3 (1-7) shows which schools had the positive factors in place. Upon examination of the table, it appears that most of the factors listed were present in the more successful schools and that fewer of them were present in the less successful schools. In general, as one reads from left to right, the total number of factors present decreases. The majority of the successful schools had frequent contact with their university facilitator and felt that he or she was available when needed. The more successful schools planned long-term, integrated programs where various SDSI activities occurred every week or two. In some schools, bi-weekly grade-level meetings were held. The less successful schools planned only a few relatively unrelated workshops, held several weeks apart. Keeping the project activities (and the school goal) continually on staff members' minds appeared to contribute to the accomplishment of the goal.

The most successful schools arranged for release time for participation in SDSI activities and for much of the project planning. One school lengthened their school day so that students could be sent home early on Wednesday afternoons. Teachers used this time for group--and individual--staff development activities. The less successful schools tried to find time for SDSI activities during non-school hours--clearly a difficult task.

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In the most successful schools, the BPTs involved the majority of the staff members in the implementation of various parts of the plan. Some school teams set up committees (for example, the student awards committee) to plan and coordinate the separate SDSI activities and projects. In this way, staff members were continually involved and committed to the success of the program.

The evaluation and monitoring of SDSI activities also appeared to contribute to project success. Many schools had teachers fill out simple rating forms after the workshops. Other schools had teachers fill out "logs" as they reflected on their staff development experiences. These evaluation activities served not only to provide information on how useful the workshops were, but also to help staff members feel ownership of the SDSI program.

Other indicators of more successful projects were the support of the principal and his or her willingness to let the teams take the major responsiility for the program. The most progress appeared to be made where the principal was on the team, but not the main leader of the team. In the less successful schools, there seemed to be less trust between the staff and the principal. In some of these schools, the principal dominated the interview, giving the other team members little opportunity to respond. Clearly, the team would feel less involved and committed to the project in a school where they felt it was "the

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principal's project" (not theirs).

The more successful programs also tended to involve their district personnel in the SDSI program. In a few schools, the district facilitator attended some of the workshops and planning meetings. In one school, the BPT made a presentation of their SDSI project to the board of education. Many of the teams were contacted directly to find out how things were going and what assistance was needed. Other schools never saw or heard from their district facilitator.

Based on this analysis, it appears that the factors listed above may be critical to the success of SDSI efforts. But, these factors may interact with the special characteristics of the schools. That is, without a stable, relatively harmonious staff, it may be very difficult to implement the factors that appear critical to success. The grade-level of the school may also relate to the factors of success. In this analysis, the secondary schools seemed to have fewer factors of success in place than did the elementary or middlle schools.

Conclusions and Discussion

The six-step SDSI process is effective in helping schools improve. It provides a structure by which the entire staff becomes involved in the development and implementation of a plan

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to meet a common goal. The program outcomes were impressive in all but two of the 19 schools. Staff members rated the workshops, consultants, and other planned activities favorably. They felt they had gained valuable knowledge and skills. Staff attitudes, morale, and communication also appeared to benefit from the SDSI process. Finally, the majority of participants became more aware of the ability of the university to provide meaningful help to local schools.

Administrative support of staff involvement in SDSI, a long-term collaboratively planned program, and monitoring of program effects seemed to be some of the factors contributing to the successful implementation of the SDSI building-level model. The SDSI program seemed less likely to succeed where these conditions were not met; where serious principal-staff communication problems existed; or perhaps, in secondary schools.

The support of the principal has long been recognized as a critical factor in staff development efforts (see, for example, Berman and McLaughlin, 1976). This same researach highlighted the importance of long-term programs and teacher participation in planning. The SDSI six-step model was designed to assure that staff development would be long-term and collaboratively planned. In the less successful cases, these conditions were not met. The year-long involvement of staff in coordinating the activites and the evaluation of the activities are two factors

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that have received less attention in the literature. In this evaluation study, however, they appeared to be related to program success.

The support of the outside facilitator is just beginning to be investigated in other evaluations of school improvement efforts. Eubanks and Levine (1983) studies three school improvement models similar to the SDSI program, and found that "the equivalent of one full-time facilitator is required for every one to five schools." Given the fact that each university facilitator was working with three or four schools on a quarter-time basis, the outcomes of the SDSI program are particularly encouraging. Eubanks and Levine (1983) also recommended that three months be allocated to planning in the spring and two months during the summers. In this evaluation study, the one school that spent four months writing the plan felt this was too long and experienced little pay-off for all their effort; little time was left for implementation.

It is not surprising to find lower program success at the higher grade levels. Perhaps one reason for the lower effectiveness of the programs at the secondary level was the lack of "goal consensus" found by Firestone and Herriott (1982) in their study of effective-schools factors in secondary schools. In that study, secondary schools had less of a shared sense of purpose than did elementary schools. Secondary-school principals also exerted less influence on their teachers than did elementary

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principals. These aspects of secondary schools make school improvement efforts much more difficult. Perhaps a different structure for SDSI is needed in these schools.

Based on the foregoing analyses, it is safe to conclude that the SDSI program was highly successful. In 15 of the 19 sites, the six-step process was implemented as intended and most of the schools' goals were met. Difficulties were met in the areas of time constraints, plan-writing, and university assistance. The most successful schools actively involved their staffs in program planning and coordination, had principal and district support, and had a long-term, integrated program directly aimed at their goal. With attention to these factors, adequate university support, and careful consideration of timing, the program is likely to succeed in contexts similar to those reported here.

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Table 1

School Characteristics

School Identification	Level	Community	Number of Professional Staff	Number of Students	Goal(s) Chosen
01	Elementary	Urban	26	650	Micro-computer Technology Grade-level promotion standards
02	Elementary	Urban	24	467	"Workshop Way." Philosophy, reading, math, phonics, self-concept, workshop schedule, and homework.
03	Elementary	Urban	23	400	Develop a Center Philosophical Statement.
04	Elementary	Urban	29	760	Improve student behavior. Create a positive school climate.
05	Elementary	Urban	28	783	Uplift staff morale by reducing paperwork and improving student discipline.
06	Elementary	Urban	6	180	Learn about computers. Improve Science program.
07	Elementary	Sub-urban	16	-	To maintain focus on the establishment of a variety of approaches. Learn about computers. Language development
08	Elementary	Urban	12	274	Revise the curriculum to improve achievement levels and test scores. Effective teaching.
09	High School	Urban	92	1,584	Resolve inter-personal communication problems within the school. Improve the quality of work life.

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School Identification	Level	Community	Number of Professional Staff	Number of Students	Goal(s) Chosen
10	Elementary	Suburban	15	299	Establish a system of discipline. Teamwork and communicaton between staff members. Improved classroom management strategies.
11	Middle School	Suburban	26	591	Transition to new assignments. Communication.
12	Elementary	Suburban	13	367	Conflict resolution. Organizational problem solving.
13	Elementary	Suburban	22	352	Improving communication. Awareness of current research on teacher effectiveness.
14	Elementary	Suburban	24	222	Classroom management. Improve the overall student behavior. Community participation. Teacher reassignment.
15	Elementary	Urban	15	479	Enrichment activities. Science and basic-skills instruction.
16	Junior M.S.	Suburban	24	629	Communication. School discipline.
17	Junior M.S.	Suburban	37	750	Mathematics Program.
18	Junior High School	Suburban	25	626	Develop a cohesive and cooperative staff in order to implement the middle school concept.
19	Elementary	Urban	13	313	Develop reading continuum. Establish discipline code.

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Table 2

Schools' Questionnaire Responses

QUESTIONS	01 (N=17)	02 (N=21)	03 (N=14)	04 (N=25)	05 (N=26)	06 (N=7)	07 (N=19)	08 (N=11)	09 (N=29)	10 (N=14)	11 (N=13)	12	13 (N=17)	14 (N=19)	15 (N=22)	16 (N=21)	17 (N=2)	18 (N=	19 (N=18)	Average of All Schools
A.																				
1. I have gained valuable knowledge	1.4 (.5)	1.4 (.5)		2.0 (.8)	1.4 (.6)	1.3 (.5)	1.6 (.6)	1.5 (.5)	2.2 (.7)	1.9 (.9)	1.6 (.5)		2.0 (.4)	1.4 (.5)	2.1 (.8)	2.3 (1.0)	2.0 -		1.7 (.5	1.7 (.3)
2. I have gained valuable skills	1.4 (.5	1.5 (.6)		2.0 (.8)	1.6 (.6)	1.3 (.5)	1.6 (.6)	1.5 (.5)	2.4 (.9)	1.8 (.9)	1.9 (.8)		2.1 (.6)	1.7 (.6)	2.1 (.6)	2.8 (.8)	2.0 -		1.8 (.4)	1.8 (.4)
3. I feel I have more responsibility and ownership in staff development	1.5 (.5)	1.7 (.7)		2.0 (.8)	1.8 (.5)	1.3 (.5)	1.9 (.4)	1.6 (.7)	2.3 (.6)	2.3 (.6)	2.0 (.8)		2.4 (.6)	1.6 (.6)	2.2 (.5)	2.1 (.8)	2.0 -		1.8 (.7)	1.9 (.3)
4. I feel I'm more active in school decisions	1.4 (.6)	1.9 (.9)		2.1 (.9)	1.9 (.6)	1.3 (.5)	2.0 (.5)	1.8 (.9)	3.0 (.9)	2.3 (.9)	2.2 (.9)		2.5 (.5)	1.6 (.7)	2.3 (.7)	2.1 (.8)	1.5 (.7)		1.9 (.7)	2.0 (.4)
5. The communication among staff members has improved	1.5 (.1)	1.7 (.6)	1.8 (.7)	1.9 (.7)	1.8 (.4)	1.3 (.5)	1.9 (.6)	2.0 (.4)	2.8 (.8)	1.9 (.8)	1.8 (.7)		2.1 (.5)	1.3 (.5)	2.1 (.6)	2.4 (.8)	1.0 -		1.7 (.6)	1.8 (.4)
6. I feel the University can be helpful for school improvement	1.2 (.4	1.4 (.5)		1.9 (.8)	1.7 (.5)	1.1 (.4)	1.6 (.5)	1.5 (.5)	2.4 (.7)	2.0 (.5)	1.8 (.4)		2.1 (.4)	1.5 (.6)	1.9 (.6)	2.2 (.8)	2.0 -		1.9 (.2)	1.8 (.4)
B.																				
1. I have felt commited to meeting our goals thru the plan	1.4 (.5)	1.6 (.5)	1.5 (.5)	1.8 (.7)	1.7 (.5)	1.3 (.5)	1.8 (.4)	1.6 (.7)	2.0 (.7)	1.7 (.7)	1.4 (.5)		2.0 (.4)	1.3 (.5)	1.9 (.5)	2.3 (.7)	2.0 -		1.3 (.5)	1.7 (.3)
2. I feel generally positive about staff development experience	1.4 (.5)	1.5 (.5)	1.6 (.7)	1.7 (.9)	1.7 (.6)	1.3 (.5)	1.6 (.5)	1.5 (.5)	2.3 (.9)	1.8 (.8)	1.7 (.6)		1.8 (.4)	1.3 (.5)	1.8 (.5)	2.5 (.7)	1.8 (1.0)		1.4 (.5)	1.7 (.3)

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QUESTION	01 (N=17)	02 (N=21)	03 (N=14)	04 (N=25)	05 (N=26)	06 (N=7)	07 (N=19)	08 (N=11)	09 (N=29)	10 (N=14)	11 (N=13)	12	13 (N=17)	14 (N=19)	15 (N=22)	16 (N=21)	17 (N=2)	18 N=	19 (N=18)	Av. of all Schools
B.																				
3. The Planning Committee has represented my needs	1.4 (.5)	1.6 (.6)	1.5 (.5)	1.9 (.7)	1.7 (.5)	1.1 (.4)	1.7 (.5)	1.6 (.5)	2.1 (.8)	2.2 (.6)	1.8 (.6)		2.1 (.6	1.4 (.5)	1.9 (.5)	2.2 (.7)	2.0 -		1.4 (.5)	1.8 (.3)
4. The University facilitator has been helpful during all the phases	1.2 (.4)	1.5 (.5)	1.9 (.7)	1.9 (.8)	1.9 (.8)	1.1 (.4)	2.2 (.4)	1.9 (.7)	2.1 (.6)	2.2 (.6)	2.0 (.8)		2.4 (.8)	2.1 (.4)	2.2 (.7)	2.3 (.9)	2.5 (.7)		1.9 (.3)	2.0 (.4)
5. The activities planned by our committee are more relevant	1.4 (.5)	1.6 (.5)		1.8 (.8)	1.7 (.6)	1.2 (.4)	1.9 (.8)	2.0 (.6)	2.1 (.7)	2.0 (.8)	1.8 (.8)		2.0 (.7)	1.3 (.5)	2.2 (.6)	2.0 (.7)	1.0 -		1.5 (.5)	1.7 (.4)
6. We met most of the goals and objectives																				
School Average: General Success	1.4 (1.4)	1.6 (1.6)	1.7 (1.6)	1.9 (1.9)	1.7 (1.7)	1.2 (1.2)	1.8 (1.6)	1.7 (1.6)	2.4 (2.4)	2.0 (2.0)	1.8 (1.8)		2.1 (2.1)	1.5 (1.4)	2.1 (2.0)	2.3 (2.3)	1.8 (1.7)		1.7 (1.7)	1.8 (1.8)
C.																				
1. I have had fewer problems with discipline			NA	2.6 (.9)	2.0 (.6)					2.0 (.8)				2.2 (.6)					1.9 (.3)	2.1 (.3)
2. We have fewer discipline problems on school grounds			NA	2.5 (.9)	2.2 (.6)					1.8 (.6)				2.0 (.5)					1.8 (.5)	2.0 (.3)
3. Our school climate has improved				2.1 (.9)	1.9 (.6)				2.9 (.8)	2.2 (.7)	2.2 (.7)		2.5 (.6)			2.5 (.9)				2.3 (.3)
4. Communication has improved in our school				2.2 (.9)	1.9 (.4)				2.8 (.7)	2.2 (.7)	2.1 (.9)		2.3 (.6)			2.4 (.7)				2.3 (.3)

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Table 3

Characteristics of More- and Less-Successful Schools

CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS	HIGHEST SUCCESS						MIDDLE SUCCESS												LOWEST SUCCESS			
	06	01	14	02	03		19	05	08	17	07	11	10	04	15	13		16	09	12	18
A. E = Elementary; ME = Middle School; JH = Junior High School; HS = High School.	E	E	E	E	E		E	E	E	HS	E	HS	E	E	E	E		JH	ME	E	JH
B. Special characteristic enhancing success.				✓	✓								✓								
C. Special characteristic impeding success.									✓	✓		✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
FACTORS RELATED TO SUCCESS																					
1. Received enough university assistance.																					
a - during plan writing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓					✓			
b - during implementation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓		
2. Program was long-term and integrated (not just a few workshops).	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓						
3. Conducted BDBI activities during release time.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
4. Staff were involved in year-long coordination program.	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓								
5. Conducted formal evaluation/monitoring.		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓					
6. Principal supported building level team's leadership role.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	U*	✓	U		✓			
7. District administrators were actively involved.		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓											
TOTAL NUMBER OF FACTORS PRESENT	5	8	8	6	8		7	7	3	8	3	4	7	5	3	3		4	2	0	0

* Unsure; there was some evidence that the principal had not been very collaborative in his/her planning for BDBI.

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